



NASA Employee Performance Communication System Guidance for Headquarters Employees and Managers June 2013

Part I: General Information

This document should be used in conjunction with the following Agency level Policy and guidance:

NPR 3430.1C: Employee Performance Communication System (EPCS), Change 6 (10/29/10)

- HQ guidance: Available on the NASA Human Resources Portal: <https://hr.nasa.gov/> on the Headquarters page under "Performance Management"
- SPACE: Available on the NASA Human Resources Portal: <https://hr.nasa.gov/>
- SATERN: Measuring Performance, COURSE OPM-001-06

Covered Employees

All employees are covered by the EPCS except for: Senior Executive Service (SES), Senior Scientific and Technical (ST), Senior Level (SL) employees, and certain students and consultants who serve on intermittent appointments. NASA excepted employees (NEX) *are covered* by the EPCS.

Predetermined Rating Distributions Prohibited

There can be no predetermined distribution of ratings, quota or limit on the number of ratings for any of the four summary rating levels. Employees must be rated on their individual accomplishments, relative to the requirements in their performance plans. (See Part IV for additional guidance.)

There is no predetermined limit on Distinguished ratings. Additionally, the number of Distinguished ratings given should not be dependent on the value of any award pool (e.g., award funding, Time off Awards) available within your organization. The rating given should be based solely on the employee's performance.

Linkage Between Performance and Employee Development

NPR 3430.1C stresses the connection between the annual EPCS process and the identification of employee training and development needs. Supervisors are required to have at least one development discussion with each employee. (See Part III for additional guidance)

Linkage Between Ratings and Performance Awards

An employee with a higher performance summary rating level (e.g., Distinguished) must receive a greater performance award, based on a percentage of salary, than an employee with a lower performance summary rating level (e.g., Accomplished).

For Headquarters, each Official-in-Charge for his or her organization will continue to establish, based on the awards budget (includes money and/or Time Off Awards), guidelines (e.g., percentage/range of percentage of salary) for monetary and/or Time Off Award performance awards applicable to Distinguished, Accomplished, and Fully Successful performance summary ratings.

Part II: Performance Planning

When to establish performance plans

- Within 30 days of the beginning of the appraisal period (i.e., by June 1 of each year).
- Within 30 days of a position change or a significant change in an employee's duties.
- Within 30 days of a new employee's entrance on duty.
- When an employee is detailed to different duties for more than 90 days. This may be an amendment or addition to the existing plan, or a new plan.

Employees must be given the opportunity to provide input to their performance plans

- Either the employee or the supervisor may prepare a first draft.
- Ultimately, it is the supervisor who assigns work and who therefore determines the final content of the performance plan.
- The supervisor and employee are encouraged to discuss the content of the plan to reach a clear mutual understanding of what is expected of the employee. Effective two-way communication during the performance plan development is essential to assessing the degree to which an employee has met or exceeded expectations.

Continuing two-way communication

- Under the EPCS, supervisor-employee communication is expected to be a continuing process throughout the appraisal period. The performance plan serves to focus and guide this communication.

- The performance plan may be amended if necessary to reflect major changes in program emphasis, external factors, or other unforeseen events. (See Part III for additional guidance)

Format and content of performance plans

- Performance plans must be aligned with agency or organizational goals. It is acceptable to include a statement of how the employee's work is aligned with the NASA Strategic Plan. Generally, employees in mission support positions will contribute to the same strategic goals as the technical employees in their office. Employees in mission support offices may perform work that contributes to the NASA strategic goals.
- Each performance plan must include only critical element(s). A critical element is a work assignment or responsibility of such importance that a Fails to Meet Expectations in that element would result in a determination that an employee's overall performance summary rating is Unacceptable.
- It is acceptable for a performance plan to have only one critical element that aligns with the NASA Strategic Plan.
- It is recommended that if a performance plan has more than one critical element, that these elements be bona-fide critical elements.
- Communications and Collaboration/Teamwork are to be incorporated in performance standards, as they are no longer mandatory separate elements.

Documenting performance plans

SPACE is a tool that automates NASA's EPCS process. SPACE does not replace the need for supervisors and employees to engage in face-to-face communications. Although supervisors are prompted to initiate performance plans in SPACE, performance plans should be drafted and completed outside of SPACE to ensure expectations are clearly communicated. There are instructions to assist supervisors and employees throughout the EPCS process (planning, midpoint, and rating) in SPACE under the Reference Guides tab.

Tips for writing the critical element(s) and performance standards

- Critical element(s) are the employee's primary work assignment or responsibility.
 - A critical element should demonstrate how the employee's performance contributes to the Agency's goals and/or functional objectives.
 - Ask these questions:
 - Does the employee's critical element track to the supervisor's plan?
 - Do both supervisory and non-supervisory objectives logically track to the NASA Strategic Plan?
 - How does the employee contribute to the strategic goals? Is it through minimizing agency costs; time savings; or diminished litigation risks?
 - Useful phrases:
 - ...to support the...in order to carry out/accomplish...so that...
- Performance standards must be written at the "Meets Expectations" level

- Each employee must have the opportunity to substantively exceed the standards, and achieve a “Distinguished” end-of-year rating
- Performance standards should be constructed using the SMART framework

Specific: The elements and standards clearly identify the expected outcome including measures that indicate what objectives have been achieved.

This is the “what.” Envision the final outcome/result; state simply, concisely, explicitly

Measurable: The verifiable and observable for quality, quantity, cost-effectiveness (need not be all three).

- Avoid “absolute” (always) and “backward” (never) statements
- Helpful adjectives are usually, generally, typically

Achievable: Performance standards are written at a Level 3 “Meets Expectations”:

- Are the work objectives within employee control?
- Are the work objectives flexible in case some unforeseen event occurs?

Results-oriented: Expressed as the employee’s deliverables/accomplishments.

Time-based: Identifies timeframes

- Avoid “absolute” statements, e.g., Always submitted by due date
- Avoid “backward” statements, e.g., Never late
- Useful phrases: Within sufficient time for event to be accomplished; Generally consistent with the XXX target delivery schedule

Generic critical element(s) are recommended for employees in similar positions

Part III: Performance Monitoring

General requirements

- Performance communication is a continuing process. Supervisors and employees are urged to take advantage of regular discussions, such as status reports, updates, program review meetings, as opportunities for two-way communication on the achievement of performance expectations.
- Either the employee or the supervisor may initiate a formal progress review at any time during the year.
- At a minimum, one formal progress review is required.
- NPR 3430.1C requires that Center human resources certify to the NASA Office of Human Capital Management, no later than November 30 of each year, that the midterm progress

reviews have been completed. The Headquarters Human Resources Management Division (HRMD) will issue a reminder each year to Headquarters offices, and will set a reporting date that is slightly earlier than November 30.

The midterm progress review meeting

- Before the meeting, the supervisor should:
 - Review the current employee performance plan
 - Offer the employee an opportunity to provide input
 - Gather any documentation relevant to performance, such as:
 - Notes that he/she has made or has received from others (team leaders, customers, etc.)
 - Status reports, project summaries, and similar documents in common use within the office.
- Before the meeting, the employee should:
 - Review his/her current performance plan;
 - Assess progress to date on each of the performance elements;
 - Identify significant accomplishments so far this year;
 - Address assistance needed from the supervisor in order to meet his/her performance requirements. This may be an employee's role in the organization, developmental or training needs.
- At the meeting, the supervisor and the employee should:
 - Discuss progress on each element in the performance plan. This discussion may include specific examples of accomplishments, what is currently in progress, and future goals.
 - The performance plan may be amended, if necessary. The progress review is a good time to review the critical elements and standards and to document any modifications to the performance plan. If changes need to be made to include revised or new elements, a new plan must be created and signed in SPACE.
 - For example:
 - If an employee has changed positions, or has been assigned significantly different duties, one or more new performance elements;
 - If an employee is detailed to another position during the appraisal period or matrixed to one or more projects for 90 days or more, the detail/matrix supervisor or project manager(s) with input from the employee must define duties and assignments.

Performance that does not meet expectations

- Supervisors should consult with the Headquarters Human Resources Management Division as early as possible if any employee is performing at the "Fails to Meet Expectations" level in any critical element.

Development Discussion

- Supervisors are required to discuss development/training needs with each employee at least once during the appraisal period. A forward-looking progress review includes offering an employee the opportunity to establish an Individual Development Plan (IDP). The IDP formally documents the learning and development goals and activities of the employee as discussed during the midterm progress review. The IDP is a powerful tool that can be used to help employees stay focused on enhancing their skills and competencies in a particular performance area.
- The HRMD/Employee and Organizational Excellence Branch offers many excellent courses, seminars, and programs to HQ civil servants to meet their learning and development goals.
- There are other development opportunities that do not involve formal classroom training or involve direct costs. For instance, details, rotational assignments, and other work assignments give employees learning experiences outside their normal job responsibilities.

Part IV: Performance Ratings

- Each eligible employee must be given an annual official performance rating (rating of record), normally within 30 days after the completion of the appraisal period, i.e., by May 30 of each year.

Employee input

- As with the planning and monitoring steps, the employee must be given the opportunity to have input to his/her performance rating. Regardless of the format, employees are encouraged to provide input on accomplishments relative to performance elements and standards, specifically, addressing how they believe they have met or exceeded their assigned performance standards.

Narrative Summary

- The narrative summary documents the employee's overall performance to the standards. It must be clear and justify the rationale for the performance summary rating assigned.
- Utilizing the input from the employee can be a very useful tool as this input may contain information the supervisor may have overlooked. In addition, it is an effective way to keep performance an interactive process between the employee and supervisor.
- Accomplishments during the rating period should be as described outputs (products and/or services) produced by the employee. Use specific examples to describe what or how the accomplishment was achieved.

- The narrative summary should describe the element used to achieve results. By identifying the element in the narrative summary this will better demonstrate whether the employee met the expectations as stated in the performance plan.
- A description of the scope and impact of the employee's accomplishments on the office and NASA should be included in the narrative summary in order to explain how the critical work activity supports the identified goals.
- The supervisor should meet with the employee to discuss the employee's accomplishments and the organization's achievements, and to communicate the final rating. The rating is to be signed by both the Rating Official and the employee to indicate the appraisal was held.
- Any recognition received during the appraisal period should also be included; this includes both monetary and non-monetary recognition, e.g. letters and emails.

Reviewing Officials

- The Officials-in-Charge will review all ratings for trends and consistency. This review is documented to HRMD with end of year ratings.
- A second-level supervisory review and signature are required for Unacceptable summary ratings. This review should be completed before the supervisor communicates the rating to the employee.

Detailed/Matrixed employees

- Employees who have changed positions, served on details, or have been matrixed longer than 90 days will be rated by their supervisor of record.
- The detail/matrix supervisor must provide a written assessment of performance on the detail/matrix to the supervisor of record.
- The supervisor of record must consider the detail/matrix supervisor's input in preparing the final rating.

Position changes – employees

- When an employee moves to another position within NASA during the rating period, the losing supervisor will assess the employee's performance on his/her performance elements and standards up to that point. This assessment will be completed on the performance form. However, the losing supervisor will not assign a summary rating; this assessment is not a rating of record.
- The assessment will be given to both the employee and the gaining supervisor.
- The gaining supervisor will assign the employee to a new performance plan (as described in Part II of this document).
- At the end of the appraisal period, the gaining supervisor will consider the previous supervisor's assessment in preparing the final rating of record.
- If the position change occurs within 90 days of the end of the cycle, i.e., February 1 or later, the gaining supervisor may use the previous supervisor's assessment as the final rating of record.

Position changes – supervisors

- When a rating official leaves his/her position prior to the end of the rating period, he/she will assess and document each employee's performance on his/her elements and standards up to that point. However, no summary rating is assigned.
- The assessments will be given to each employee and to the incoming supervisor, or to the person who is authorized to act in the supervisory position.
- The new supervisor must consider the previous supervisor's assessment when preparing the final rating of record.
- If the supervisory position change occurs within 90 days of the end of the cycle, i.e., February 1 or later, the gaining supervisor may use the previous supervisor's assessment as the final rating of record.

New Employees

- The NASA minimum appraisal period is 90 days. Employees who have been on a performance plan for less than 90 days as of April 30th will have their performance period extended until the 90-day period has been completed, at which time they will be rated on the plan that was in effect during that period. They will then be given a new performance plan that will be in effect from the end of their 90-day extended performance period through April 30 of the following year.
- If the employee received an initial performance plan very late in the performance cycle, that plan may be extended and the employee rated as of the end of the next cycle.

Rating levels (definitions from NPR 3430.1C, except for Level 5 Substantively Exceeds Expectations which has not yet been incorporated)

Element rating levels:

- **Substantively Exceeds Expectations.** (Level 5) Performance that consistently exceeds the performance standards to a substantial degree for the element.
- **Meets Expectations.** (Level 3) Performance that fully and consistently meets the performance standards identified.
- **Fails to Meet Expectations.** (Level 1) Performance that fails to meet the established performance standards.
- **Not Rated.** The employee has had an insufficient opportunity to demonstrate performance on the element. An element that is "Not Rated" does not impact the overall summary rating.

Summary rating levels:

- Summary ratings will be determined by calculating the average of 3 and 5 element ratings with the following thresholds:

- 3.X = Fully Successful (Level 3) summary rating
- 4.X = Accomplished (Level 4) summary rating
- 5.0 = Distinguished (Level 5) summary rating
- If any element is rated 1, the summary rating is Unacceptable (Level 1)

Table of Summary Rating Definitions and Linkages

Summary Rating	Definition	Linkages/consequences
Distinguished	All element ratings are Substantively Exceeds Expectations	Eligible for QSI; Eligible for performance award
Accomplished	The calculated average of 3 and 5 element ratings is between 4.0 and 4.9999	Eligible for performance award
Fully Successful	The calculated average of 3 and 5 element ratings is between 3.0 and 3.9999	May be eligible for performance award
Unacceptable	Any critical element is rated Fails to Meet expectations	Not eligible for performance award; Must be placed on a performance improvement plan (PIP)* Failure to satisfactorily complete the PIP may result in removal or demotion

* An employee may be placed on a PIP at any time during the performance cycle if performance is at the Fails to Meet level for a critical element. An Unacceptable rating of record is not required.

Part V: Reconsideration

An employee who disagrees with the Rating of Record may request reconsideration by the Rating Official.

- A. To request reconsideration, the employee must:
 - a. Submit the reconsideration request to the Rating Official no later than 15 days after receiving a copy of the completed Rating of Record. Be given the opportunity to present oral and/or written information supporting the request at a time mutually agreed to by the employee and Rating Official.
 - b. Reconsiderations are performed by the Rating Official, who should normally document a resolution or issue a decision within 15 days.
- B. Reconsiderations must be copied to Human Resources (HR) to facilitate guidance and oversight and to ensure resolutions/decisions are documented.
- C. If a Bargaining Unit employee is dissatisfied with the reconsideration decision, he/she may submit his/her request to their Second Level supervisor for review and decision in accordance with the Headquarters labor-management negotiated agreement.
- D. If a non-Bargaining Unit employee is dissatisfied with the reconsideration decision, he/she may continue the informal process or formally grieve the Rating of Record in accordance with NPR 3771.1, Grievance System.

NPR 3430.1C remains in effect.